

*By Erika Lovley, Politico*

The newly formed High-Performance Buildings Congressional Caucus may not be on the radar of many climate enthusiasts, but expect it to be a growing voice in next year's energy debate on Capitol Hill.

Co-chaired by Reps. Russ Carnahan (D-Mo.) and Judy Biggert (R-Ill.), the House caucus has more than a dozen members and will launch a membership drive early next year, largely focused on attracting Republicans and incoming freshmen on the Energy and Commerce Committee. The group will focus on increasing energy efficiency and lowering the carbon footprint of buildings.

President-elect Barack Obama has called for energy efficiency and home weatherization as major priorities in a green agenda that could also help revitalize the nation's slumping economy.

Some caucus members are already considering introducing green-building legislation that experts expect say could include tax incentives and implementation of a smart-grid system.

Caucus members are also eyeing economic stimulus or climate bills as potential vehicles for green measures, according to Carnahan spokesman Jim Hubbard.

"This is a largely bipartisan issue," Hubbard said. "All options are on the table."

The green buildings issue will likely be one of the easiest energy-related ideas to move through Congress next year. It has attracted the support of environmentalists and much of the business sector, which would profit from a green jobs push.

The High-Performance Buildings Congressional Caucus Coalition that briefs the lawmakers includes the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers and the U.S. Green Building Council, among others.

According to the coalition, buildings are responsible for 39 percent of U.S. carbon emissions each year, equal to the combined carbon emissions of the United Kingdom, France and Japan.

Many coalition members are drawing up proposals for the new administration, including annual updates of building energy use and the appointment of a national energy efficiency adviser.

The congressional caucus was formed as a response to the 2005 and 2007 energy acts aimed at building a green workforce.

"We hope ... the individual members will be called upon to help facilitate greater understanding

and emphasis on building energy issues,” said Doug Read, government affairs director at ASHRAE.

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